

Federation for Child Study Bulletin

For the purpose of helping parents make their parenthood more intelligent, more efficient, and of the highest use to their children.

Vol. 1

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No. 8

Curiosity

By Elizabeth J. Woodward

WHAT other touchstone may a child apply to the immediate edges of the little world he lives in except that gift of his birthright which we call curiosty?

The little child tastes, feels, listens; he watches, imitates, dramatizes, becomes; he breaks and tears; he pounds and pulls, and by the use of all his senses, tests his environment long before he shows the form of curiosity which we most easily recognize as such, where it begins to prick our complacency, that is, asking questions.

If the baby does not show response to these sensations we are anxious lest he may not be normally keen.

If an older child takes the pose of "no interest" it is a reflection of the home or community of which he is a part and an adverse comment upon it as well. If he is actually not interested to test his world he is either repressed by the ignorance of those about him or he is mentally or physically ill. In any case, parents and teachers should bend themselves to the problem, for curiosity is a vital means of growth. It may be merely a matter of vocabulary—he may not know how to frame his question or he may fear that he will not understand your answer. A child asks what seems the same question over and over; occasionally, of course, this is a

trick to gain time, but more often it is because he is adjusting your adult phrases to his thought.

The question he asks is not as big in his mind as it is to your ears. Your reply itself—the words—is not as momentous as it seems to you, but the manner of your reply is vital. He asks, "Where is God?" and the next instant, unless you over-emphasize the question, he is playing expressman or steam engine again in entire unconcern. He does not expect an answer from your profound thought; his question may sound the depths of what you have to give, but he is not seeking to measure your knowledge.

With the naturally slow or reserved child, it may well be the need of getting behind the problem or question, or of absorbing it, before he can put it into the words of his own growing personality. We do the same; we revolve a new idea in our maturer minds, until we utterly reject it, or until we accept it tentatively as part of our mental equipment. Not until then do most of us put our questions in words, even to those whose thoughts lie close to ours. It has been and is potentially a part of our growth in individuality.

When Speech finally comes to the aid of Curiosity, she brings a bunch of keys. They jangle a bit even in

The Federation for Child Study

announces the

Annual Christmas Exhibit

of

Children's Books

Wednesday, December 3rd,
to Friday, the 5th, inclusive

Open to the public from 11 A.M. to 5 P.M.

at the

Meeting House of the Society for Ethical Culture
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who will speak on
"Arabian Nights"

Among Mr. Pogany's achievements are the settings for
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Free to members

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Mother's patient ears, but Why, What, Who, Where, How, unlock the secrets of the universe.

Grown-up defences must then be ready to meet the onslaught of inquiry, for parental wisdom is never nearer the divine than when telling the truth to a child. "Nothing but the truth," always: "the whole truth," seldom.

A child hungers for ethics, for guidance in the conduct of Life, long before he knows it, and a person whose mind is not open to ethical possibilities ought not to be with children.

You are teaching truthfulness where you reply truthfully to his question with an answer that to his ears sounds final and *that carries no hint of mystery*.

When the child asks, "Where did I come from?" you are strewing your path with thistles if you frame your answer, "You came down from heaven." Heaven and the sky are too nearly interchangeable in nursery parlance and in song and story not to bring confusion in place of clarity.

"Did I come when it rained?" "Who caught me?"

If the child has seen the moon, or learned to watch the stars, it will not be many years before he will seek some other authority, for of course he will not believe that he is kin to a meteorite!

If we believe with Dr. Kiropp Lake that a knowledge of facts is the basis of virtue and of religion, we must be sure of our facts, and of the order in which we think it wise to present them.

Should the next question be, "How did you know I was a little boy?" the questioner may be taken as soon as possible to see a *little* baby girl have a bath, not once, but several times.

The investigator is satisfied: seeing is believing: a girl is different. He deems it useful knowledge on the part of Mother, and he has received fresh proof that Mother *knows*. Of course, little girls who see baby brothers or cousins in the bath are inoculated against curiosity as to "how boys look," which is as articulate as a girl usually becomes upon the subject.

The child living in the country has the opportunity of meeting the question of the early whereabouts of the baby much more normally than children who do not know plants and animals as everyday companions. He may be shown the seeds of plants, the pine tree which has pollen branches, and the other pine, looking like it, but bearing the crimson "blossoms" which later will

become cones. He sees the bird's nest with well guarded eggs: the hens, keeping the eggs warm until the chickens are strong enough to live without the shell; mother-cat keeping her kittens warm inside her furry "stomach": lady-dog "married" to a father dog, and then having puppies.

It is the resulting chickens, kittens, and puppies that are of primary, wholesome interest to the child, and the preliminaries are accepted as nature's way of presenting new material. The story of human motherhood will lose none of its noble beauty because of its likeness to the friendly animals.

But granting that it is desirable to answer all of the child's questions—can it be done thoroughly? Heaven forbid! Thoroughness does not belong to young children; a child does not know a subject thoroughly; he thinks in points, touches the point which interests him, and the subject is his ever after; he has the key to it, though it may grow rusted by disuse.

On the floor of one of the kindergarten rooms the solar system drawn in crayon challenged the visitor as scarcely adapted to kindergarten days or ways. It was an outgrowth of the questions—not of one child but of many children. They were satisfied with the small measure of truth for which they asked, and soon their active feet danced the sketch, literally, from sight.

Though the child's knowledge cannot and should not be thorough, it should be sound—a simple, active nucleus for larger truths. The little question demands only the little answer: to give a full answer is to inflict a wrong. You must become a little child to hear and answer. If you add to your reply the tactless, "You can't understand yet," or, "I'll tell you more when you are older," or "You will know, bye and bye," you do not answer at all, and the child knows it. Next time he will ask someone else, not you. But if you answer his little groping thought with a germ of truth and say it as if you believed it, he will accept it as final. When the idea recurs, it will have grown and he will want to know more. He will ask *you*, and with each question and answer will draw nearer to the full confidence in you and with you, which will become your pride and his safeguard.

This is not a counsel of superficiality; this is not teaching self-deception; it is weaving his web of life with fine, strong threads as he sees their beauty and their strength.

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Child Study Groups

Minutes of a Meeting of Chapter 54

Topic: Curiosity

Sources:

Groves: Personality and Social Adjustment.

Gruenberg: Outlines of Child Study.

Hall: Curiosity and Interest (Pedagogical Seminary, Vol. X).

Sully: Studies of Childhood.

Gruenberg in his "Outlines of Child Study," says: "At first an unconscious discomfort urges the child to find what lies around the corner or beyond the horizon; later a wondering about the foot of the rainbow or what fate has in store for him; and at last, perhaps, a search for the hidden meaning of life and destiny or for the lost Atlantis. This irresistible impulse to reach in thought and in feeling beyond the immediate present is of great importance in education, since it makes possible the fixing of the attention so necessary for all kinds of learning, as well as the leading on to new levels of thought, of experience, and of ideals or purpose. The direction and the satisfaction of curiosity cannot be left to chance.

"Sublimation of curiosity may take the form of systematic research in some branch of learning; of active investigation into some current problem; of the professionalizing of some special interest as in certain branches of law, medicine, industrial engineering, administration, detective work, and so on; of the development of a hobby involving the mastery of specialized information, exploration and the like; and of habitual open-mindedness."

Groves defines curiosity as one of several expressions of self-assertion. Obstruction of the child's early investigations may impair later intellectual ability. The child's first attention to sex is likely to be a matter of curiosity, and parents must take great care lest an unnatural reaction follow an attempt to suppress what is merely natural curiosity.

Hall states that there are four stages of curiosity or primitive craving for knowledge: passive staring, surprise, wonder and curiosity. The child passes gradually from passive to active observation, the latter developing normally toward the close of the first year. No longer content with merely seeing things, the little investigator desires to touch, taste, smell and handle everything within reach. Active interest in nature, in plant

and animal life, develops rapidly after the first year. The questions relating to the origin of life appear between the ages of three and eight.

Curiosity is manifested by (1) observation, passive and active; (2) experiments; (3) questions; (4) destructiveness; (5) desire to travel.

Curiosity is the active factor in the development of attention, and lack of it shows either mental deficiency or bad pedagogy.

Sully asserts that the child's first expressed effort to understand the things about him may be said to begin with the fourth year. This he calls "the questioning age." Verbal questioning, following closely, as it does, the dawn of the reasoning impulse, is the child's attempt to add to the scrappy, unsatisfying bits of information his own observation has gathered concerning the things in his world. It is the outcome of an intellectual craving, of a demand for mental food.

The questioning may take various directions: First, it may be prompted by thirst for fact. The typical form of this questioning is "What?"

A second direction of this early questioning is towards the reason and the cause of things. The typical form here is "Why?" The young mind, confronted with so much that is strange and unassimilated—things that stand apart from his familiar world—seeks to connect these new odd things with old recognizable ones. Thus his desire to understand why pussy has fur is met by telling him that it is pussy's hair.

The child's "why," however, indicates also an inquiry into the origin or making of things. He has a vivid speculative as well as practical interest in production, and supposes that all things are hand-produced by somebody, as are the household possessions of his familiar world. Thus he asks who made the animals, the wind, babies, etc., and inquiries whether baby was bought in a shop. This "Why" takes a more special meaning when the idea of purpose becomes clear, and the child seeks the *end*: "Why does the wind blow?" His thoughts about things are penetrated with the idea of purpose and use. His view of causation starts from his most familiar experiences.

All this range of questioning is the outcome, not merely of ignorance and curiosity, but of a deeper sense of perplexity, of mystery and contradiction.

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The Book and the Child

The printed page is today so much a part of civilized life that very few children can escape its influence. To a very large extent this influence is altogether casual and uncontrolled. Words and phrases and whole paragraphs are absorbed when the child is unaware of reading, to say nothing of learning. It is therefore of first importance that so much of the child's reading as we do control shall be of a kind calculated to inform, to inspire, to guide in wholesome manner. Where we select the books that are to come into the child's hands the responsibility for the choices we make becomes serious.

The children's books listed in the Supplement to this number of *The Bulletin* have been selected with great difficulty because the number of good books offered by the publishers this year is gratifyingly large. We have considered, in making these selections, not merely the acceptability of the contents and the illustrations, nor the negative merit of harmlessness, but positive values for the service of their readers. Some books of merit have been excluded because their language does not seem suited to the ages of children to which they are addressed; others because they disregard the right of children to have the facts of history, of nature, and of human life presented to them without dogma or prejudice. Many books not included have no outstanding value, but are quite suitable for the children who read much and who have an opportunity to develop standards through the reading of superior literature. For slower readers, however, the list offers an abundance of the very best.

As to the literature that has no basis in reality, that is unsound in its idealism, and trashy in its construction, it would be a great mistake to forbid children the reading of it; but under no circumstances should we stamp it with our approval by actually presenting it to the child.

Parental Education

Education for parenthood is claiming an ever increasing share of attention on the programs of educational institutions, social work groups, editors and publishers.

Teachers College, Columbia University, is repeating this year the course in Leadership for the Education of Parents which last semester attracted such large registration and widespread interest. The expansion of the course into two sections of two semesters each—one course of lecture work and one of field work—is an indication of the increased importance which this field of training has assumed at Teachers College. The field work is conducted under the direction of the Federation for Child Study, and includes observation, discussion and participation in the activities of organized parent study groups, in order that students may visualize the linking up of the theory acquired in their lecture work and the practical problems of parent organization and parent training. Eight highly qualified young women have been enabled, through Scholarships granted by the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, to come to New York from various parts of the country to take this course.

The New School for Social Research in New York City devotes six of its fifteen lecture courses this winter to problems having direct bearing on child study. These include courses in Behavior Psychology, Mental Hygiene, Habit Training in Children, Mental Hygiene Problems of Childhood, Introduction to Social Psychology, Personality Development.

Boston University School of Education is conducting a course of fifteen lectures on "Understanding the Child and His Needs." The course is under the direction of Dr. J. Mace Andress, and the lectures are given by eminent experts on the various aspects of childhood. The course is planned to be of practical value to teachers, mothers, ministers, social workers, and to all who are responsible for the training of children.

The increasing number of new books and current periodicals dealing with the many aspects of child study is further evidence of the growing demand for education and information in this field.

Curiosity

(Continued from page 2)

Curiosity when it is true interest, grows upward to sympathy, and is the gateway to noble research in every field; but like other qualities, it may grow downward to the reverse of its height—to intrusive questions, inquisitiveness.

Curiosity in the adult is often curbed by the very vastness of the matter to be curious about: we select and eliminate. The child knows no limit, no scale of values, and we are unfair when we tell him not to ask questions about things he cannot understand. He doesn't know that there is anything which he cannot understand! The duty of discrimination is laid upon the grown-up who must not let him see that one question is trivial and another vast.

The connection of topic or question to the present or to any recent happening you may not see, but to the child the relevancy is there, and the query must be bravely met.

Mothers must often echo Tagore's wish:—

"I wish I could take a quiet corner in the heart of my baby's very own world. I know it has stars that talk to him, and a sky that stoops down to his face to amuse him with its silly clouds and rainbows. . . .

"I wish I could travel by the road that crosses baby's mind, and out beyond all bounds; where messengers run errands for no cause between the kingdoms of no history; where Reason makes kites of her laws and flies them, and Truth sets Fact free from its fetters."

Child Study Groups

(Continued from page 3)

The child must be encouraged in his belief in the possibility of knowledge, and his questing must never be impeded by loss of faith. The child's questioning, however, is of unequal value, and we must learn to discriminate between the mechanical, purposeless questioning (often only a symptom of fatigue or mental irritability), and the questioning which seriously seeks for knowledge and understanding.

Discussion:

The desirability of fully answering children's questions was discussed. In our eagerness to give the child all of our knowledge, we often seek to forestall his curiosity, forgetting that the child really does not want, and in fact, cannot assimilate, facts unrelated to his own experiences.

One little girl of ten years, advised to ask her father a question which her mother felt could be more fully answered by him than by herself, replied, "But if I ask Father he will give me a long talk about it, while all I want to know is just this one thing." The fear was expressed that, in limiting our replies to exactly the amount of information asked for, we are losing valuable educative opportunities. The wise parent will be careful to suit the correlated information in his replies to the age of the child, at the same time watching to see when the point of saturation has been reached—and the indications of this are easily discernible.

It was pointed out that the parents' own fund of information is often not sufficient to meet children's questions—especially those of older children. The parent must learn to say frankly "I don't know," since the child's faith is more likely to be weakened by discovery of pretense than by admission of ignorance. But this admission must be accompanied by an attitude of helpfulness—a willingness to help him find out, for when a child is seriously seeking information he should be helped to get it while his interest is active. So far as possible the child should be encouraged to think out the answers to his own questions in terms of what he already knows, so that his past knowledge and experience will relate itself to every new question. Often a question may be met by a counter question: "What do you think?" to clarify what is in the child's mind.

The question of how far a child's curiosity may be responsible for his destructive tendencies was discussed. In most instances parents will find that the destroying of toys is largely due to the desire for doing something with those toys, and can best be met by supplying materials which can be handled constructively. There is, however, a destructiveness which is a manifestation of entirely other impulses, and this must be handled as the implications of each case may warrant.

How should a mother deal with the type of questioning which is continuous and insistent, but which obviously is not seeking information? It is necessary first to determine the underlying cause for the questioning and to guide one's action accordingly. The child may be sparing for time—deferring bed-time or some undesired activity; or he may be using this means for drawing and holding the attention of his mother; he may be over-tired, restless; or possibly his questions disguise a desire to ask some question (usually on sex matters) which he hesitates to put frankly

Federation Activities

Lectures

The Mental Hygiene of Adolescence

Dr. Jessie Taft, Director of the Child Study Department of the Children's Aid Society of Pennsylvania, and of the Girls' Aid Society of Philadelphia, delivered two lectures, the first on Wednesday, November 12th, the second on Wednesday, November 19th.

The subject of her first lecture was "Family Relationships." Dr. Taft pointed out that it is difficult to talk about the mental hygiene of adolescence since adolescence is not a thing in itself but only one stage in a continuous process. The infancy and childhood of the adolescent must be recognized as factors in his mental health and these in turn are dependent upon the parental and other relationships, upon the habits and conditionings which have become part of his responses to life. Fully half of the disasters of adolescence are due to maladjustment of parents and teachers, the other half to the effect of an influx of new energy and unfamiliar emotions upon an individual unprepared by his previous experience to interpret or use them. The parents who have failed to understand and readjust the child's behavior often seem to hold the child responsible for their own ignorance and failure; and this is the attitude of society in general toward youthful offenders. By punishment and a blind attempt at reform, we try to force upon the offending adolescent a wisdom and control which his parents and teachers have lacked. Although there may be certain problems which are too subtle or too complicated for our present insight, adults are not justified in washing their hands of their responsibility when a child shows obvious difficulty in adapting himself to the environment which they have built up. Understanding of adolescence must be based upon an attitude of mind which seeks not to fix the blame but to apply objective and intelligent insight.

One of the fundamental conflicts during adolescence is the struggle between the two ideas of safety: one the sense of firm support which loving parents and a stable home alone can supply, the other the sense of security which comes to the young person with the knowledge that he may rely upon himself for salvation. Neither of these two ideas is ever completely abandoned in adult life, but the emphasis varies greatly in different individuals, many of whom remain essentially

adolescent or even infantile in attitude. If the first essential for the child's normal growth is security in the family, the second is the freedom to grow away from the parents and the family intellectually, economically, and emotionally. The tragedy of life lies in the fact that the satisfaction of our need for security within the family circle may forever prevent the fulfilment of our second need—the freedom to leave it. The third need is the need for tasks and the use of the tools to do them—the need for contacts with reality, for the growing confidence and power which ability to carry through real purposes alone can provide.

For the first time, the young person must begin to find himself outside the protecting shelter of the family. Is it any wonder that in the average boy or girl, this sudden glimpse of what growing up means should bring about tremendous fear reactions, desires to stay within the family fold alternating with passionate aspirations toward that which lies outside? Only the adolescent who can temper the boundlessness of his desires and aspirations with capacities and opportunities for accomplishing definite things, will have a constructive outlet for the added influx of energy which accompanies adolescence.

In her second lecture, "The Adjustment to Work," Dr. Taft cited a detailed case history of an adolescent girl who had stolen small sums of money which she spent on useless trifles. The conclusions drawn from the record showed that the child's conduct was an egoistic, compensatory seeking for satisfaction: the result of an atmosphere of disapproval at home and at school. To help this child it is necessary to give her constructive and socially valuable outlets, to help her to become practically efficient, so that she may learn to enjoy power legitimately through success in work. The danger of adolescence lies chiefly in the fear of parents and their resentment against the growing up process—their unwillingness to give up, to loosen the reins, to let go responsibility and risk experimentation. Although this freedom cannot be given all at once, it should be aimed at from the start and at every step growing independence, responsibility for choice, decision and plan should be fostered. The environment should be made rich with opportunity for doing. In the last analysis adolescence possesses the transforming power to free each one from the bonds of self and fling him out into a new world where he is free to live his own life.

Book Reviews

One Little Boy, by Hugh de Selincourt.
Albert and Charles Boni, New York, 1924.

It is an arresting and almost impassioned plea for "parental education" which Mr. de Selincourt makes in "One Little Boy." He has built up a strong case for an intelligent sympathy with childhood ways, based on modern scientific ideas of the problems involved. He demonstrates dramatically in the very real little person of pathetic "Hullerton major" how definitely habit and character may be made or marred by methods of dealing with the child. The part which heredity may play is rather left out of the picture, but whatever aspects of the question are waived, all of the reader's sympathy goes out to this boy of eleven who has fallen a prey to undesirable sex-habits which still loom darkly in the minds of many as "vice" and "sin."

A public flogging by his headmaster and a private one by his loved and hitherto trusted mother plunge the child into the gravest danger, for he is certain that he is, in his own words, "a dirty little beast" and an "utter rotter," cut off from the possibility of human love. His self-respect is gone, and to him all things seem unclean. This state of mind results in serious distortion of the boy's ideas and aggravation of his unfortunate practices. Lying and deception are added, and his mental and moral development tremble in the balance.

The mother suffers through all this as keenly as he. She runs true to a very familiar form, instinctively sympathetic and understanding, but handicapped by ignorance, by the conviction of the unholiness of the physical, and by habitual obedience to the dicta of anyone in authority, in this case the schoolmaster. It is this brand of ignorance and docility against which Mr. de Selincourt has made his fight in "One Little Boy."

The lad's regeneration is wrought by a sympathetic girl, who brings him to a sense of the beauty and sacredness of the physical, and, in his childish way, to a spiritual conception of it. It is a case of a child understanding a child, but Paula is perhaps somewhat too mature, wise and subtle to be a convincing fifteen-year-old.

That this writer has been strongly influenced by Freudian thought there can be no doubt. The hall-marks are present in the mother's dream-symbolism, the headmaster's repressions, and the many small happenings, seemingly accidental, but in reality purposeful according to Freudian doctrine. In the way of this school, too, Mr. de Selincourt approaches matters difficult of expression with great frankness. The combination of intense realism with delicacy of suggestion is an outstanding feature of an interesting, sincere, and for parents, an important study.

M. L.

The Normal Mind. William H. Burnham.
D. Appleton & Co., New York, 1924.

The space of a brief review can permit no more than the mention of those outstanding features of Dr. Burnham's book which will be of especial interest to the reading parent.

The author gives a clear presentation of the conditioned reflex and its implications in regard to habit formation. There is a detailed exposition of the factors that make for a unified personality, the keynote for which is the necessity for the integration of self. Dr. Burnham stresses as the

three essentials for mental health the having of a task, a plan, and freedom to work out these independently and responsibly. He calls attention to contributing causes of mental ill-health, one example of which is failure due to a sense of inferiority—the possible result of taxing a child with tasks beyond its power.

The author's point of view as an educator with the mental hygiene attitude is one of his most salient contributions. The book will be of great interest to parents who wish to understand the modern behavioristic and mental hygiene point of view.

J. R. M.

Books Received for Review

The Child: His Nature and His Needs.

A contribution of the Children's Foundation. \$1.00.

The Psychology of Religion. George Albert Coe.

The University of Chicago Press. \$2.75.

Experimental Practice in the City and Country School.

Caroline Pratt. E. P. Dutton & Co. \$2.50.

Psychology. Everett D. Martin.

The People's Institute Publishing Co. \$3.00.

Marbacka. Selma Lagerlöf.

Translated by Velma Swanston Howard. Doubleday, Page & Co. \$2.50.

The Revolt of Youth. Stanley High.

The Abdingdon Press. \$1.00.

The Education of Exceptional Children. John Louis Horn.

The Century Co. \$2.00.

The Mastery of Fear. William S. Walsh, M.D.

E. P. Dutton & Co. \$2.00.

Suggested Readings

From Current Periodicals

A Twenty-four Hour Day for the Pre-School Child, by Julia Wade Abbot. Childhood Education, November, 1924.

Expressing the need for intelligent understanding of child care and child training. The author gives a survey of the field: schools and universities, where education for parenthood is carried on, and other agencies where parents themselves study the problem.

Teaching the Young to Think, by D. W. Fisher. The American Mercury, November, 1924.

The writer of the article is of the opinion that the young must be provided with thought stimulus in the form of accumulative world experience on which to formulate present (application) thinking.

Teaching Home Relationships, by Lydia Jacobson. Home Economics Teacher, Training Staff, Iowa State College. Child Welfare Magazine, November, 1924.

A very valuable experiment conducted in a school at Huxley, Iowa, of practical help to both teachers and parents.

Making Self-Expression Socially Acceptable, by Alice E. Johnson, M.D. Child Health Magazine, October, 1924.

Explaining the meaning of the Habit Clinic. "As scientific workers we are not so much concerned in making these children good as in preventing the fixation of bad habits."

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At the annual meeting of the Federation for Child Study, held on November 5th, action was taken on several important matters, including the election of the Board of Directors. Announcement of these, together with a full report of the year's activities, will appear with the December issue.

Federation
for
Child Study



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Publications

of the

Federation for Child Study

Outlines of Child Study—

A Manual for Parents and Teachers
Published by The Macmillan Co., 1922.....\$1.80
and postage

Sons and Daughters

By Sidonie M. Gruenberg.....\$1.10
and postage

Studies in Child Training.....each .10
Obedience (Series I, No. 1.)
Punishment (Series I, No. II.)

Parents' Book List, 1922.
Free to Members. Non-members..... .25

Supplement to Parents' Book List, 1923-1924.
Free to Members. Non-members..... .10

Suggestions for a Parent's Book-Shelf.
Free to Members. Non-members..... .05

Supplements to Children's Book List, 1921, 1922, 1923
Free to Members. Non-members..... .10

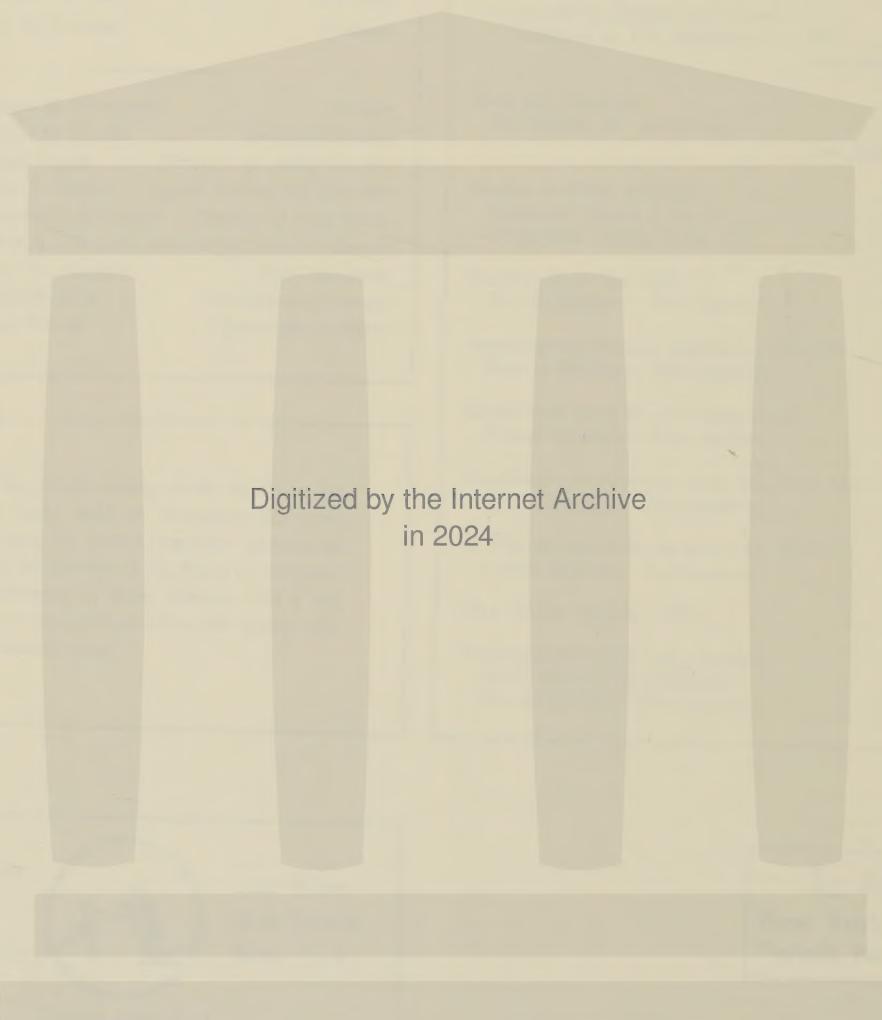
A Selected List of Music Books for Children.
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Play School Manual, 1919..... .50

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